

and resurrection of the Word of God.

Conclusion

At the end, merciful compassion is revealed as dynamic happiness; in motion, it is a matter of doing, of performing acts that embody and engender love. What do I do to create love or kill love? P. Monier in his book *Sermon sur la montagne*, p. 45 says: “*Take misery into your heart. Love, help not abstract justice, faith, humanity, but your loved ones. A bounty of benevolence is worth more than ten tons of food.*” To speak of mercy leads us to speak of another kind of mercy: forgiveness given to others. The request to Jesus: “*How many times should I forgive my neighbour? Seven times?*” But Jesus answers: “*Not seven times but seventy times seven*” (Mt 18:21-22).

Mercy is the state of mind of the one who cannot see misery without allowing it into his heart ... The merciful is permeable to the misery of others, is permeable to the generous love of God.

Blessed are you the merciful ... Blessed are you if the misery of others touches your heart. Blessed are you if you do not judge your neighbour and if, like the Good Samaritan, you come down from the mount of your complacency, you lean towards the other, you reach out your hand to heal the wounds of life. Blessed are you the merciful because you will obtain mercy ...

Reflection:

What gesture of mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation does the Lord ask of me in the concrete circumstances of my life?

Blessed are all of you who accept to close your eyes to a mistake, a weakness; who are able to excuse, to understand.

Blessed are you if you know how to take time to soothe and relieve poverty in all its forms.

For Jesus, the effective love of people in poverty is a priority, as is the effective forgiveness of enemies. But is there a more beautiful and effective way to forgive your enemy than to help when he or she is badly caught?

Do we want to be happy? Let us practice mercy ... It is a privileged way to happiness. It is also a path within our reach in everyday life ...

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Apostles for Today

Prayer and Reflection - December 2018

HOLINESS, A JOURNEY MADE TOGETHER

“Seeing and acting with mercy: that is holiness” (GE 82)

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall have mercy shown them (Mt 5:7)

Introduction

By saying “blessed”, Jesus proclaims the happiness of the person which this beatitude describes. At the heart of Jesus’ life, of his message and his gestures, is the human person who, for him, comes first, before the law, before institutions: the person is sacred. The beatitudes are understood only from this centre which is the person.

The happiness proclaimed in the beatitudes comes from a certainty: that the person is the beneficiary of the loving presence of God. It is a true joy, because it is based on faith, faith in the benevolent accompaniment of God, and on a hope in the full reception of the goods of the heavenly Kingdom.

But, the true and lasting happiness that lives in the depths of our lives (personal) is also the happiness of others (community). The question of my true happiness cannot arise without that of the happiness of others and conversely the question of the happiness of others cannot be posed without that of mine. We must read the beatitudes according to these two keys to find there not external moral principles, but a profound impulse for both personal and social existence.

1. Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy

What happiness for those who let themselves be touched by the suffering of others: yes, they will themselves be relieved. This beatitude links our happiness with our attitude towards our neighbour. Our relationship with our neighbour is closely bound up with our relationship with God. “What you did to the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it to me.” (Mt 25: 40).

Our world today does not easily leave room for emotions, feelings, active compassion, mercy ... To this often hard and merciless world, Jesus, today as yesterday, proclaims: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy (Mt 5:7). This could be understood as: blessed are those whose heart is open to misery (compassionate) because someone in turn will relieve their misery.

2. The meaning of the word “Mercy”

In the Christian context, the word mercy can refer to God in the midst of the misery of human beings. Misery with a hundred faces. The misery of bruised bodies like many of the victims of genocide, the misery of wounded hearts like those of orphans and widows because of our ethnic and fratricidal wars, the misery of alienated spirits, the misery of the sin of those who killed and continue to kill others, the misery of ... we could continue the list. This beatitude, added by Matthew, translates a teaching of Jesus that refers to a vision of God widely revealed in the Old Testament, a God full of pity (compassion) who teaches mercy and forgiveness.

In Exodus (3:7-8), in the episode of the burning bush, Yahweh first says: *“I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt; I have heard them crying for help on account of their taskmaster (so He is not insensitive to their anguished appeals); yes, I know their pains ...”* God showed **1. compassion**, by seeing the misery of his oppressed people ... he was moved to his depths ... Then He was **2. moved to act in mercy and forgiveness** of sins: *“I will come to deliver him from the hand of the Egyptians and I will bring them up to a land flowing with milk and honey”*. Thus, mercy is first of all a characteristic of God, which He can give to anyone who desires it.

3. Compassion, mercy and beneficence (doing good)

Compassion also includes a dimension of beneficence, a habit to do good, God’s active benevolence in response to all kinds of misery and poverty, including its most material forms. For the Old Testament, mercy is a feeling of compassion or pity, inclining God to human beings, to those who are wretched, to give them what they lack. Through compassion, God measures the extent and depth of his children’s need: lack of food (Ps 111, 4-5) or clothing (Ex 22, 25-26 and Gn 3, 21) or need for protection (Ps 86, 14-16). Having experienced poverty in my family and our neighbourhood, seeing people going to bed without food, living among people who are naked, daily being with children on our streets without families, there is a great need of concrete compassion today in the sense expressed by St. John Eudes: *“one is merciful who carries in his heart, through compassion, the miseries of the miserable”* (Œuvres Complètes [*Complete Works*], volume 8, p. 53)

“Merciful” compassion starts from an inner attitude which flows out into action. It involves opening our hearts to feel deeply the misery of others and taking action to do all that we can to relieve their distress.

4. God’s mercy

Jesus in the Gospels practiced these two aspects of mercy also in the forgiveness of sins. Like his Father, he practiced divine forgiveness to those who recognised

themselves to be sinners, in need of and open to receiving the forgiveness of the merciful Lord. Jesus bears witness to mercy above all through his predilection for those called sinners who need salvation. Often people are mistaken about God; they think that he is a tyrant who demands sacrifice. Jesus supersedes this process of itemising faults and condemning: *“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners; it is mercy that I want and not sacrifice”*. (Mt 9: 13)

Looking at Jesus’ behaviour we better understand the merciful Father, such as Psalm 86:15-16-17: *“But you, Lord, God of tenderness and mercy, slow to anger, full of love and fidelity, turn to me, have mercy on me, give your strength to your servant and your saving help to the son of your maidservant, show me a sign of your kindness ...”*

There is no true mercy except by reference to and participation in God’s mercy. This was very visible with survivors of the Rwandan genocide who were able, with God’s help, to forgive, to visit in prison, to meet and greet with compassion those who had killed members of their families.

It is also true to say, at the level of being, that Christ is not only merciful by his merciful action, but he is mercy in his very being. Through mercy, he not only shows that poverty touches his heart, but he actually remedies it. Some people have also done like Christ. I remember very well the situation after war and genocide in Rwanda, the Pallottine Father and Brothers were very involved in the reconciliation of people, but they also used to help many abandoned children by giving them hope, by paying their school fees and, according to their possibilities, by building houses for some of them. So it was not only about feeling sensitive but also looking for remedies for concrete distress. This was also my first motivation to join the Pallottines.

Christ’s humanity gives his mercy a quality of love beyond what the Old Testament could suggest. The Old Testament tells us that mercy is possible; God is not resentful... his mercy is untiring: *“Can we find a God like you? Cast our sins to the bottom of the sea”* (Mi 7: 18). God revealed himself to be the “Holy One”: *“I am God and not man. In the midst of you I am the Holy One”* (Hosea 11:8). In the New Testament, the Holy one, as we know, took flesh in Jesus Christ: *“He is true God and true man”*. God’s heart has also become a human heart, his mercy reaching us in the most intimate part of ourselves. This was the wish of Saint Vincent Pallotti. He used to say that the Creator God is Trinitarian and He is full of Love and Mercy: *“Oh! Excess of incomprehensible love! Ah! My God, infinite love of my soul, ineffable mercy! Oh! The divine inventions of your infinitely merciful love!”* (OOCC, XI, p. 236.)

The Pallottine spirit magnifies the “loving inventions of divine mercy” and perceives that divine justice is infinitely merciful. This divine mercy is brought to its supreme expression through the incarnation, passion, death